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Chapter 2

Drivers and challenges in the internationalisation of higher education and research: the case of the Southern African–Nordic Centre

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THE GLOBAL CONTEXT FOR INTERNATIONAL collaboration on research and development is changing rapidly. It is no longer easy to confine problems associated with issues such as environmental degradation, migration and climate change to developing countries. These problems affect people worldwide, and it is now widely acknowledged that higher education and research are key, if sustainable development is to be achieved. Furthermore, it is no longer sensible to work in isolation in our globalised world, and the internationalisation¹ of higher education, combined with international research partnerships and networks, is playing a bigger role than ever in strengthening education for sustainable development. Consequently, much is expected from the science- and knowledge-producing communities, in terms of finding solutions to the problems of development and growth in developing countries, and offering guidance to decision- and policy-makers. Science journalist David Dickson (2009) summed this up as follows:

Anyone seeking to tackle the problems facing the developing world must remember two simple facts of life. First, none of these problems – from food shortages and the spread of disease, to achieving sustainable economic growth – can be addressed without the use of science and technology. Second, harnessing science for development depends on the skills of a country's people. And that in turn requires a robust and effective higher education system – the only mechanism that can produce and sustain these skills.

This situation also means that governments have to deploy their national budgets to mainstream capacity development in the areas of higher education and research. Yet, many governments still seem to overlook the important information contained in Dickson's observation, and many poverty-reduction strategies do not refer either to science or to strengthening the tertiary education sector. These are serious omissions as these strategies are meant to guide investment priorities for decision-makers and donors. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, policy-makers and governments in the North have made some progress in this regard. In Scandinavia, for example, the Norwegian government has prioritised the education sector in its development policy. And Denmark's Africa Commission has listed the promotion of 'post-primary education and research' among its five priority areas. This shift has led to increased support for several higher education initiatives in Africa, including the UniBRAIN programme, which aims to co-ordinate the efforts of university educators, researchers and business leaders in the field of agricultural innovation (see Africa Commission 2009; UniBRAIN n.d.).

In this chapter, I focus on the internationalisation of higher education as a key instrument and strategy for capacity development in higher education and research in the North and the South. I first outline the wider context of the internationalisation of higher education and research, focusing on changes in the donor support for capacity development in the higher education sector in developing countries. Second, I present and discuss the findings of a survey on the internationalisation of higher education and research carried out in collaboration with the secretariat of the Southern African–Nordic Centre (SANORD),² among its member institutions. The rationale for SANORD institutions' engagement in internationalisation is analysed and the challenges explored. Focus is directed towards those challenges that are specific to developing countries. Finally, recommendations and ideas on possible ways forward conclude the chapter, and I highlight some of the key issues that need to be addressed for institutions like SANORD to fully benefit from internationalisation.

The context: is higher education back on the development agenda?

In 1994, the World Bank announced that higher education should not be prioritised in development strategies; from being allocated 17 per cent of its education budget between 1985 and 1989, higher education received a mere 7 per cent of the organisation's education budget between 1995 and 1999. Following this period of drastic cuts during the late 1990s, several factors

combined to get higher education back on the agenda of major development donors (including the World Bank) by the beginning of the twenty-first century.

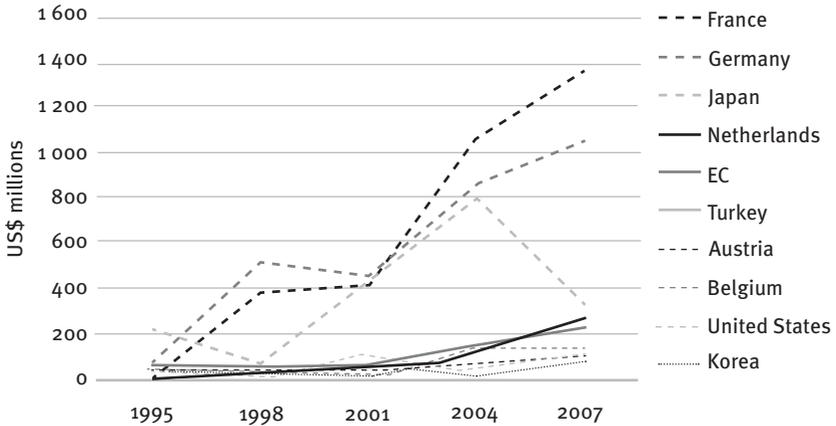
Table 2.1 shows the distribution of World Bank education lending by sub-sector during the period 2005 to 2009. The Bank's focus on post-basic education was especially strong in 2008, with lending to tertiary education accounting for 25.9 per cent of total World Bank lending to the sector. However, World Bank support for tertiary education decreased drastically in 2009, returning back to lows seen in the late 1990s. Figure 2.1 illustrates the funds allocated by the top ten Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) donors to the higher-education sector between 1995 and 2007. With the exception of Japan, the graph confirms a general increase in donor funding to higher education during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

TABLE 2.1 World Bank education lending by sub-sector, 2005–2009

Sector	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009	
	Million US\$	% of total								
Adult/ non-formal education	5.0	0.3	39.6	2.0	37.0	1.8	19.0	1.0	0.4	0.1
General education	506.5	26.0	456.6	22.9	627.0	31.0	504.0	26.1	1 036.0	37.6
Pre-primary education	88.0	4.5	147.3	7.4	14.0	0.7	36.0	1.9	185.0	1.2
Primary education	565.2	29.0	552.3	27.7	414.0	20.5	702.0	36.5	998.0	28.0
Secondary education	375.6	19.2	449.3	22.6	253.0	12.5	99.0	5.1	944.0	24.8
Tertiary education	360.8	18.5	263.4	13.2	260.0	12.9	499.0	25.9	208.0	7.5
Vocational training	50.1	2.6	81.9	4.1	415.0	20.6	69.0	3.6	74.0	0.9
Total	1 951.1	100	1 991	100	2 022	100	1 927	100	3 445	100

Source: World Bank (2012).

FIGURE 2.1 US\$ millions allocated to higher education by the OECD's top ten donors 1995–2007



Source: OECD (Various).

A report published by the World Bank and UNESCO in 2000 indicated that higher education in developing countries was in a ‘perilous’ state and, while higher education could not guarantee rapid development, sustained progress would be impossible without it (Bloom and Rosovsky 2000).

Capacity building in higher education has, since, been on the agenda of several international meetings. For example, UNESCO’s 2009 World Conference issued a strong recommendation on the need to pay greater attention to higher education and research in the fight against under-development and poverty in Africa (UNESCO 2009).

SANORD members and the internationalisation of higher education

The data and findings presented in this section are based on a survey conducted among member universities of SANORD, and on presentations made at SANORD’s 2009 conference in Grahamstown, South Africa, on the theme ‘Inclusion and Exclusion in Higher Education’. I draw particularly on the session entitled ‘Higher Education and Research Collaboration in a Globalised World’, which was organised by the Danish Development Research Network (DDRN)³ with Danish SANORD member universities. The following extract from an African member university’s internationalisation

policy captures the essence of internationalisation in SANORD very well; it defines internationalisation as: ‘The process of developing, implementing and integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of higher education’. Of the 20 SANORD institutions that responded to the survey, 18 have an internationalisation policy, and although these differ in format and focus, the overall understanding of the internationalisation is basically the same for all institutions. All emphasise issues of *process*, and the need for the *integration* of international and intercultural dimensions into the teaching methods, research and service functions of the institutions is reflected in most of the respondents’ descriptions of their respective internationalisation policies.

Likewise, all the institutions see globalisation as having profoundly affected the way in which countries, institutions and businesses operate. Accordingly, internationalisation is recognised as an essential element of quality higher education and research. As expressed by one of the survey respondents, ‘internationalisation is essential and affects everything’. Furthermore, all SANORD members seem to agree that a key characteristic of excellent higher education anywhere in the world is its global relevance.

Drivers of internationalisation

The increasingly competitive environment in which universities operate is reflected in the internationalisation objectives of both Northern and Southern universities. Nordic universities expressed the need to secure their institution’s position of strength in the global market, to sharpen their competitive edge and to strive to become the ‘premier university in EU’ by, for example, ‘improving co-operation opportunities with the best international higher education institutions’. The position and reputation of universities is also seen as vital in the South. Thus the University of Cape Town’s internationalisation policy aims to: ‘to assist the university in growing its global profile with an Afropolitan niche’, and recognises its location in the Southern African Development Community, in Africa and globally as central to its mission. Institutional culture, intercultural understanding and the promotion of multiculturalism were rated highly by many of the respondents and seen as key principles of internationalisation. However, acute concerns about economic survival, and securing a strong institutional position in the region and/or globally, were seen to pose a threat to the principles of solidarity and equity.

In order to better understand the reasons why institutions engage in internationalisation, respondents were asked to rank a list of pre-defined

TABLE 2.2 SANORD institutions' ranking of reasons for engaging in internationalisation

Reasons	Unimportant	Of little importance	Of some importance	Of great importance	No response
Contribute to academic quality	0	0	2	18	0
Create international profile and reputation	0	0	5	15	0
Increase student and faculty international knowledge, capacity and production	0	0	5	15	0
Strengthen research and knowledge capacity production	0	0	0	20	0
Promote curriculum development and innovation	0	0	7	13	0
Diversify income generation	0	6	8	6	0
Broaden and diversify source of faculty and students	0	1	9	10	0

reasons for engaging in internationalisation process. The results of the ranking are shown in Table 2.2.

Institutional motivations

The primary motive for SANORD members engaging in internationalisation is to 'strengthen the research and knowledge capacity production' of staff and students. Many respondents also saw the creation of an 'international profile and reputation' and its precondition, 'academic quality', as key motivations. It is important to note that internationalisation, combined with collaboration through strategic alliances and networks, promotes changes in curriculae and in educational and research methodologies. Approximately a third of respondents indicated that 'diversification of income' was of little importance. This was quite surprising, considering the tough economic climate, budget cuts and increasing competition for funds and projects that many universities were facing. However, one respondent added 'employability' as a very important rationale for engaging in internationalisation.

Instruments

All members agreed that ‘alliances’, ‘agreements’, ‘networks’ and ‘mobility opportunities’ were key instruments in SANORD’s and their own institutions’ internationalisation strategies. Other exchange and collaboration mechanisms that many respondents rated as important were ‘visits from international scholars’ and ‘international development programmes’.

No one rated instruments, such as establishing ‘campuses and delivery of educational programmes abroad’ highly, but several respondents indicated that ‘South–South collaboration’ should be added to the list of important instruments. Some respondents also found it necessary to qualify some of the options given in the questionnaire, and one respondent noted that ‘joint degrees’ were especially important at doctoral level. Another respondent commented that ‘distance education’ was a high priority in certain fields, such as development studies.

Benefits

By engaging in the internationalisation of higher education and research, SANORD institutions expect to obtain benefits, such as improved academic quality, increased capacity, etc. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate the priority given to a number of pre-defined potential institutional results and benefits, focusing on benefits *actually* achieved.

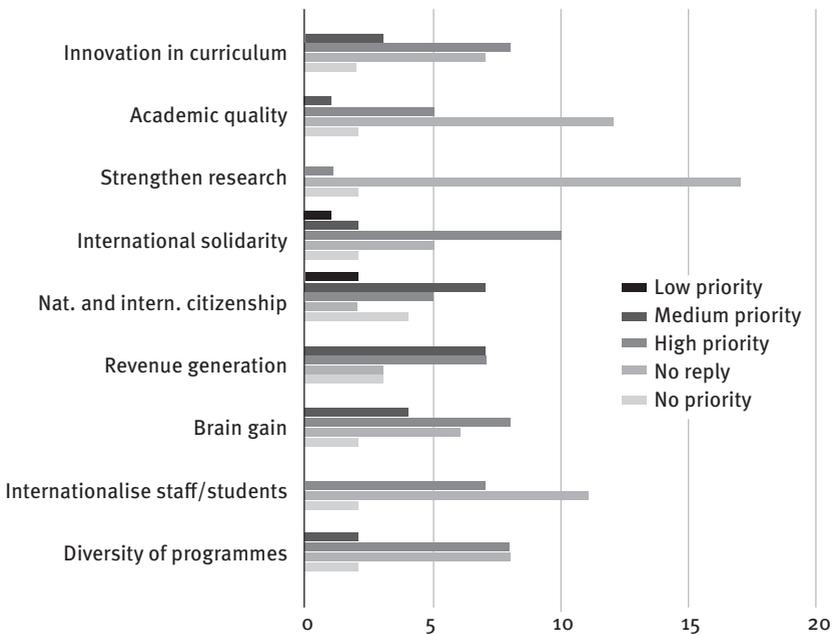
As shown in Figure 2.2 the top score was ‘strengthened research’ with 17 out of 18 respondents indicating that this was an actual benefit achieved (two respondents did not reply to this question). Among other benefits that scored highly were ‘academic quality’ and ‘internationalise staff/students’ and ‘brain gain’, including brain gain in Europe.

As pointed out by one of the respondents, the specific benefits proved to be difficult for the respondents to rate at institutional level, given the range of different faculties involved. One respondent also drew attention to the fact that the importance of a benefit like ‘innovation in curriculum’ varies depending on the field in question. Further investigation of this issue at faculty or departmental level may be useful in future.

What this does indicate, however, is that the top three priorities in terms of achieved benefits, correspond very well with the key principles and reasons for engaging in internationalisation, namely: to ‘strengthen research’, improve ‘academic quality’ and ‘internationalise staff and students’. There is no doubt that collaborations can have huge returns in terms of knowledge creation, circulation, development of capacity, networking, etc. To document these returns is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is hoped that further ways

of measuring the actual benefits of collaborations fostered by SANORD will be explored. The policy on internationalisation developed by Rhodes University (in South Africa) mentions that the international office, among other things, does research on the process of internationalisation. The results of such research could, perhaps, be a starting point for the further sharing of knowledge and experience on the process of internationalisation across SANORD institutions.

FIGURE 2.2 Prioritisation of the benefits of internationalisation of higher education and research



Information about the institutional collaborations that SANORD members are involved in was collected by asking the respondents to describe the two most important programmes at their respective institutions – one in higher education and one in research. We obtained 24 descriptions of programmes from 12 institutions in seven different countries in SANORD (three from southern Africa and four in the North).⁴ The brief descriptions of programmes included the title of programme, the purpose, contact person and websites.

The main purpose of this aspect of the survey was to get an idea of the types of collaboration SANORD institutions were engaged in;⁵ it does not give a full picture of the collaboration programmes within SANORD.

In the higher education field, most collaborative programmes outlined by respondents seemed to try to bridge the traditional North-South divide, but some also focused on enhancing regional co-operation such as the programme described by the University of Witwatersrand, and student exchanges such as those run by Bergen University College. On the whole, the higher-education collaborations described form a fairly heterogeneous group of programmes, and differ in both scope and content. They include long-term collaborations at institutional and personnel levels, twinning agreements, and capacity building in relation to post-secondary education and training. Some institutions have scholarship programmes specifically targeting master's and PhD students within specific areas. For example, there are post-graduate training programmes aimed at promoting women's legal rights in east and southern Africa, and several institutions have student-mobility schemes or student-exchange programmes in health, technology and other areas.

Collaborative programmes focused on research include larger strategic programmes, including long-term capacity building within research programmes. Two such examples are the Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education and the international science programme at Sweden's Uppsala University, which aimed to strengthen basic sciences in developing countries through building South-South networks. On a smaller scale, specific exchange programmes and smaller research projects linked to key themes identified by SANORD were in place. Common to most of these programmes was a strong element of capacity development and exchange.

Challenges – funding, dependency and marginalisation

The positive trend in the international development community with regard to funding higher education and research (discussed earlier) was not reflected in SANORD institutions' responses on this issue. Generally, it was felt that internationalisation is given a lot of 'political' attention at institutional level, but only half of the respondents indicated that internationalisation was given high priority in terms of the allocation of funds and other resources. The same discrepancy between political and economic support was revealed in the priorities of national governments. Only four respondents found that their respective governments accorded a high priority to internationalisation in terms of the allocation of funds. The positive exception here is Norway, which

has included higher education and research as a sector in its development aid policy.

In many developing countries, the fiscal crisis that began in 2009 has caused a reduction in social investment and, consequently, a decline in financial support for universities. Under these circumstances, universities and research institutions have to deal with increasing pressures to obtain external funding to help to cover the high costs of educational programmes, research projects, and technology upgrades.

With regard to the international donor community, the picture is less clear. No respondents indicated that the international donor community sees internationalisation as a high priority, either politically, or economically. On the other hand, only a few seemed to think that donors give higher education a low priority. Quite a number of respondents chose to skip the question. This may be partly because it is difficult to give a general answer without discussing specific organisations and donors.

Respondents were also asked to prioritise a given list of barriers and challenges with the possibility of adding others. The results indicated that there are five main challenges preventing SANORD institutions from engaging fully in internationalisation. These are listed below and then discussed in more detail:

- a lack of capital and issues of resource shortfalls, such as poor ICT capacity and connectivity; enrolment explosions, but low participation rates etc;
- the commercialisation of internationalisation;
- the exclusion or marginalisation of weaker institutions from collaborative programmes;
- the dominance of North–South relations and dependence on Northern financial support means that South–South exchanges are too rare; and
- structural barriers.

The marginalisation of weaker institutions is closely linked to capacity issues, resource shortfalls and the increasing competition to be counted among the top ten (or even top hundred) institutions in a field, a region or the world. Weaker institutions in developing countries become less attractive when partners in the North seek partners and long-term collaborations. Emerging countries in Asia are often favoured, and Africa is at risk of losing out in the scramble for funds and minds. One of the respondents in the SANORD survey drew attention to the negative aspects of the ‘ranking culture’ that prevails in the higher education sector, noting that it was a major challenge to ‘locate the institution in the global configuration where rankings become

important and the institutional profile and programme offerings are immersed in criteria that apply to particular elite institutions and dismiss institutional areas of excellence’.

The prominence given to the issue of exclusion and marginalisation underlines the relevance of SANORD’s 2009 conference theme, ‘Inclusion and Exclusion in Higher Education’. It also points to the importance of seeing internationalisation as a ‘tool in national integration policy’ as mentioned by one of the southern African universities. This is not to say that marginalisation is not an issue for the Nordic countries, where the small size of the region, language barriers, etc. also play a role. A respondent from a Nordic institution illustrated this, stressing that ‘internationalisation and knowledge of international development are the lifelines of small nations’.

Insufficient funding for higher education and research is a general problem across institutions and countries, both North and South. There is no doubt, however, that universities and researchers in developing countries are worse off, and are thus particularly vulnerable in the struggle for resources and collaboration partners. Dependence on resources from the North is almost absolute. Furthermore, insufficient funding and unequal access to resources lead to imbalances in the partnerships that do exist.

Structural barriers and bureaucratic inflexibility are another barrier to internationalisation. Institutional policies and funding mechanisms are often not conducive to collaboration across countries and regions, and can prevent student and staff mobility. Respondents cited heavy institutional management burdens – that is, bureaucracy, delay in disbursement of funds, etc. as severe barriers to collaboration. In this regard, Finland’s efforts to adjust the funding instruments of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education to enable polytechnics and universities to participate in publicly funded development partnerships, provides a positive example of a way of addressing such structural inflexibilities. There are institutional challenges too. According to Gerald Ouma, a senior lecturer at the University of the Western Cape, and member of the South African Higher Education Funding Review Committee, collaborative work is, at times, not seen as official work when it comes to allocating workloads. He argues that this is mainly because collaborative ventures are generally not institutionalised. Instead they are seen as revolving around individuals. Another challenge mentioned by Ouma is that most funding is short term, but there is need for long-term perspectives. In other words, strategic interests can shift before capacity is adequately entrenched. Such challenges have severe implications for academic freedom and institutional autonomy. For example, funding is meant to benefit students

from particular countries that are considered to be of strategic interest to the funding country. But who makes decisions about which students to enrol and which ones to exclude?

Another challenge that emerged from the presentations at SANORD's 2009 conference was the way in which cultural differences and language problems can lead to misunderstandings, particularly in relation to credit-transfer systems and intellectual-property issues. In his presentation to the DDRN session on drivers and challenges in higher education, Ouma also raised the issue of North–South collaboration being considered or perceived as development aid. The implication of this is that the Northern partner is viewed as the 'giver'. The 'stranger' or the weaker partner in the network – usually a Southern institution – is often brought in to meet funding requirements, and is easily marginalised. Such researchers are expected to show gratitude because their capacity is being 'developed', and they are often ignored in decision making related to the allocation of funds, curriculum development, research design and the development of research tools, etc. In practice, they are reduced from being collaborators to being research assistants.

According to Ouma, collaborations in networks also include power relations. Pant (2009) affirms this view, noting that networks have become one of the most significant social trends of our time, and help to channel efforts towards achieving specific agendas.

Recommendations for SANORD

Recommendations made by respondents in the SANORD survey fall into two broad categories, namely resources and practices. Both stress the issue of capacity building. Funding for student and staff exchange programmes, and for research collaboration, was a major concern. Recommendations linked to funding, structural and other issues are listed below:-

Funding

- Review funding practices to increase the number of staff and student exchanges.
- Secure additional financial support for African students to study in the North.
- Explore funding possibilities for joint programmes.
- Secure sustainable funding for activities.
- Lobby donors to provide seed grants for collaborative projects.
- Establish a university consortium to target EU funding.
- Lobby donors to provide more assistance without dictating terms.

Structure

- Remove barriers related to language, credit-transfer systems and mobility.
- Enhance student and teacher mobility.

Co-operation and partnerships

- Develop relations between academia and the private sector.
- Establish ‘sandwich model’ exchange programmes at PhD level; these are multi-phased schemes in which candidates carry out their coursework and research in, for example, both South Africa and Denmark under the supervision of a mentor from universities in both countries.
- Increase reciprocity and build long-term relationships.
- Provide active support for the Southern partners.
- Develop/support multilateral partnerships within Southern Africa.
- Encourage joint research between and among Northern and Southern universities.

Capacity building and training

- Ensure long-term capacity development through giving support to training and infrastructure.
- Develop and offer joint degree programmes.
- Identify and communicate institutional research priorities.
- Provide support related to proposal writing.

Networking and knowledge sharing

- Strengthen and support South–South networking.
- Prioritise multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional research.
- Support and give time to participation in networks.
- Give members opportunities to develop contacts and deeper knowledge of different institutions.

Conclusions

The demand for higher education in Africa is rapidly increasing. This opens up new opportunities for SANORD-linked institutions, in relation to agenda setting and putting research and knowledge to use. However, as the survey findings showed, it also poses a number of new challenges and increases the pressures on universities to increase their relevance and responsiveness, both globally and locally.

The internationalisation of higher education and research, both in relation to SANORD and more generally, is characterised by a push-pull mechanism. On the one hand, SANORD member universities are pushed into the

internationalisation and globalisation process as they have to provide quality and prove their relevance. But in pursuing these aims, they are also pulled into competing with each other for funds and minds in an environment where competition is continuously getting stronger. On the other hand, internationalisation is attractive to universities as a means for universities to become active members of the global village. Moreover, it can be an efficient tool in integration of the diverse communities across the university and assist in creating a multi-cultural and international learning environment.

SANORD members called for differentiated institutions and diversified programmes within each institution to cater for different types of learners. This clearly shows that the process of transformation and adaptation to change is ongoing. There is a need for greater collaboration at institutional, national and regional levels, and for collaboration to be meaningful and mutually beneficial – ‘real’ involvement of all partners is necessary. Furthermore, the institutionalisation of collaborative ventures is important for their long-term success.

The issue of inadequate funding for international collaboration in higher-education and research cuts across all institutions and remains a major challenge for SANORD, and especially for its southern African partners. The findings of the survey confirmed the need for additional funds. Efforts to diversify and extend the funding base thus need to be enhanced. At the same time, lobbying parliamentarians and policy-makers to increase government allocations to higher education must continue. Links with the private sector should also be strengthened, and innovative practices, such as public–private partnerships, need to be explored. Many academic institutions seem to be insufficiently prepared for innovation within this area, and this has negative consequences for both university development and for society.

SANORD faces a major task in encouraging researchers from several institutions to collaborate around key issues such as the improvement of policies and practices related to: research and teaching; ensuring student access and admission; curriculum development; and promotion of strategic interdisciplinary programs including multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary research projects.

Notes

- 1 Internationalisation is understood as a mechanism for institutions to enter, influence and expand strategic relationships with other universities internationally. It can involve institutional and individual collaborations, South–South, North–South, North–North, etc. Collaboration between universities, a key feature of internationalisation, typically includes: collaborative research and publications; joint programmes and training; student and staff exchanges etc.
- 2 SANORD is a collaboration of Southern African and Nordic academic institutions that have sought to promote research for development in Africa by consolidating their independent research projects towards one common goal. With over 30 members, the association has organised conferences on topics such as economic development, environmentally friendly technologies and education.
- 3 DDRN is a network linking research-based knowledge and development. The network has around 2 300 members drawn from universities, the private sector, NGOs and development organisations. Around a third of the members are from developing countries. The main purpose of the network is to contribute to integration of research-based knowledge in development through the promotion, production, dissemination and exchange of research-based knowledge. DDRN's activities include: publishing newsletters, research overviews and briefs, as well as running workshops and conferences. DDRN has a strong focus on multi-disciplinarity and North–South and North–North collaboration. Thematic focal areas include research communication, climate change and food security. For more information, see <http://ddrn.dk/>.
- 4 Eight institutions did not complete this part of the questionnaire.
- 5 The full descriptions of programmes are annexed to the working paper presented at the DDRN session that formed part of the 2009 SANORD conference. See Sørensen (2009).

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